

April 24, 2006 President Bush has been under pressure to fire Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, whom many view as the architect of a failed approach in Iraq. Even many ardent war hawks are unhappy with the Secretary for not having more troops on the ground in Iraq, and for conducting the war less aggressively than they would like. But the issue is not who serves as Secretary of Defense, the issue is how, when, and why the United States uses military force. It makes no sense simply to replace Mr. Rumsfeld with someone else who holds the same view, namely that it's the job of American soldiers and U.S. taxpayers to police the world. We should be debating the proper foreign policy for our country-- utopian nation building vs. the noninterventionism counseled by our founding fathers-- rather than which individual is best suited to carry it out. I happen to agree with Mr. Rumsfeld on the matter of downsizing the military as a whole and remaking it to reflect modern realities of warfare. A swifter, nimbler military would be better suited to tracking individuals like bin Laden who do not operate under the flag of any particular nation or army. The war in Iraq shows that we're trying to adapt our military to fit our foreign policy, rather than the other way around. For all our high-tech advantages, we are mired in a simmering urban civil war that does not play to the true strengths of our troops. The old model of warfare, based on invading and occupying whole nations, is unsustainable. Both financially and in terms of manpower, America simply cannot afford any more Koreas, Vietnams, or Iraqs. Many people in the Pentagon understand that America's armed forces are not trained in occupation, policing, and nation building. The best way to support the troops is through a sensible foreign policy that does not place them in harm's way unnecessarily or force them into uncomfortable, dangerous roles as occupiers. It's interesting to note that our founders warned against maintaining standing armies at all, both because of the taxes required to do so and the threats to liberty posed by a permanent military. Consider the words of James Madison, often considered the father of the Constitution: "A standing military force, with an overgrown Executive will not long be safe companions to liberty. The means of defence against foreign danger, have been always the instruments of tyranny at home..." Madison continues: "Of all the enemies to public liberty war is, perhaps, the most to be dreaded, because it comprises and develops the germ of every other. War is the parent of armies; from these proceed debts and taxes; and armies, and debts, and taxes are the known instruments for bringing the many under the domination of the few..... No nation could preserve its freedom in the midst of continual warfare." In other words, Madison understood that large military forces can become the tools of tyrants, and can bankrupt the nations that support them. Instead of debating who should be Secretary of Defense, we should be studying the writing of our own founding fathers. Perhaps then we will question the wisdom of an open-ended, vague war on terror and the realities of trying to remake whole societies in our image.